

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims

1. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing a fertilizer composition, comprising the following steps:

reacting a humified fossil material, which is selected from the group consisting of ~~comprising~~ leonardite, lignite, xylite and peat, in water in the presence of gluconic acid, wherein the gluconic acid is added to said fossil material in such a quantity so as to adjust the pH of the reaction medium to a value of less than 2.5; and

subsequently adding to the mixture an alkaline agent in such a quantity as to adjust the pH to a basic value.

2. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the quantity of gluconic acid added, expressed as gluconic acid at 50% by weight, is from 3% to 10% by weight relative to the weight of the fossil material.

3. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1 wherein the alkaline agent is potassium hydroxide or ammonium hydroxide.

4. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the alkaline agent is potassium hydroxide, added at a quantity of from 6% to 15% by weight relative to the weight of the fossil material, said quantity being expressed as potassium hydroxide at from 48-50% by weight.

5. (Cancelled)

6. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein step a) is carried out at a temperature not greater than 30°C.
7. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein step a) is continued for a time of from 2 to 4 hours with agitation, which is followed by an optional stationary period for a time of from 6 to 12 hours.
8. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein, in step b), agitation is continued for a time of from 6 to 12 hours, followed by an optional stationary period of up to 24 hours.
9. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, comprising the addition of macronutrient and micronutrient substances to the product of step b).
10. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 9, comprising the addition of urea in quantities of from 10% to 60% relative to the weight of the fossil material.
11. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 9 comprising the addition of plant extracts, ~~in particular extracts of castor beans and lupin seeds.~~
12. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the product obtained by step b) is subjected to drying and granulation in order to produce a composition in granular form.
13. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 12, wherein the granular composition is mixed with ~~super-absorbent polymer substances, in particular derivatives of hydrolyzed starch,~~ for preparing a granular composition having a ~~high level of~~ water retention.

14. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the product of step b) is subjected to filtration with separation of the liquid phase which is intended for use as a liquid fertilizer.

15. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14, wherein the liquid phase obtained by the filtration is supplemented with urea in quantities of from 20% to 60% relative to the weight of the liquid phase.

16. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the fossil material is a leonardite ore.

17. (Currently Amended) Fertilizer compositions in liquid form, which are ~~can be~~ obtained by ~~means of~~ the process according to claim 1.

18. (Currently Amended) Fertilizer compositions in granular form, which are ~~can be~~ obtained by ~~means of~~ the process according to claim 1.

19. (Currently Amended) A method of increasing plant growth, comprising administering an effective amount of the fertilizer composition of claim 18 to agricultural soils ~~granular composition according to claim 18 wherein the composition is used as a fertilizer, in particular for increasing plant growth.~~

20. (Currently Amended) A method to increase fertility of agricultural soils or to decontaminate soils polluted by chemical products and/or toxic metal ions, comprising administering an effective amount of the fertilizer composition of claim 18 to agricultural soils ~~granular composition according to claim 18 wherein the composition is used to increase the fertility of agricultural soils or to decontaminate soils polluted by chemical products and/or toxic metal ions.~~

21. (Currently Amended) A method of fertilizing, comprising administering an effective amount of the fertilizer composition of claim 17, wherein the fertilizer composition is administered by localized irrigation and/or by spraying leaves ~~liquid composition according to claim 17 wherein the composition is used to fertilize by localized irrigation and/or by spraying leaves.~~

22. (New) A process according to claim 11, wherein the plant extracts are extracts of castor beans and lupin seeds.

23. (New) A process according to claim 13, wherein the absorbent polymer substances are derivatives of hydrolyzed starch.